

IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH FOR ENGINEERING STUDENTS: AN EVALUATION OF THE PREVALENT TEACHING-LEARNING SYSTEM IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

Proficiency in English is very important for students of Engineering and other professional courses because it's the medium of instruction in all higher academics and is widely used as the medium of communication in all offices within the country besides being the lingua franca of all global transactions. India's national development perspective envisages our scientists and technocrats to be proficient in English which is the dominant language of science and technology. Employers in the corporate sector too want engineers proficient in English for effectively communicating in the workplace in view of growing prevalence of global interaction. A study of secondary data, published literature and a field survey conducted by the authors reveals that an overwhelming number of our graduating engineers lack Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) while entering an engineering study programme in India and they graduate without much improvement in the English language proficiency despite various intervention programmes conducted by the institutes. It is observed that English language teaching-learning process needs a total revamping to attain a discernible change in the situation. The authors recommend that International English Language Testing should be made mandatory for considering students eligible for admission to engineering colleges

KEYWORDS: Proficiency, Communication Skills, Fluency, Employability Skills, Scientific and Technical Literacy, Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills, Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, Oral Reading Fluency

Received: May 04, 2016; **Accepted:** Jun 01, 2016; **Published:** Jun 28, 2016; **Paper Id.:** IJELAUG20162

INTRODUCTION

Proficiency in English is very important for students of Engineering and other professional courses because it's the medium of instruction in all higher academics and it is widely used as the medium of communication in all offices within our country. English is also the predominant language for international commerce, trade, international relations, tourism, science, technological research, and education. Engineering students have to use English to deal comprehensively with the countless lectures conducted in English, comprehend countless sentences and paragraphs written in English in the engineering text books and reference books, tutorials, projects and dissertation papers. Academic success therefore is predominantly dependant on English language proficiency of the students. Besides that the world is increasingly becoming a small place and job opportunities are not just limited to India alone, although people may have completed their education here. A whole lot of other countries have Indian workers employed in scores. Mastering communicative competence in English, therefore, is important for the engineering students in India, not only for their academic career but also for

their prospective professional life. With this background it is pertinent to explore the status of English language proficiency levels and communication skills of engineers graduating from Indian engineering colleges. In this paper we look into the national, individual academic and professional perspectives on the importance of proficiency in English for our engineers. We also look into the English language teaching-learning process effectiveness in the Indian context.

In this paper we look into the national, individual academic and professional perspectives on the importance of proficiency in English for our engineers and the ground realities so as to be able to arrive at some strategic decisions.

Statement of Problem

The teaching and learning of English today in India is characterized not only by a diversity of schools but also inappropriate linguistic environments. In the process of language teaching and acquisition, pervasive classroom procedures are followed. Text books are prepared in such a way aiming at the success rate in the examination. Teachers also believe that the higher success rate is a good indication of better teaching but at the cost of no language acquisition. As per the statistics, India stands the second largest country where English is spoken. As per Wikipedia, 10.35% of Indian population speaks English at a rough estimation of 125 million people. Indian parents aspire their children to go to English Medium schools. But often students who leave such schools with Secondary School Certificate speak a language that would not be understood in native English speaking countries such as the UK and the USA (BBC). Is India heading toward Hinglish while English is the lingua franca? Do Indians still believe that learning English is for social mobility and individual personality? If it is the scenario, correct language acquisition is an essential factor. There are several factors that contribute to the problems of EFL teaching in India. Some of them are given below.

The National Curriculum Framework

“Every skill and outcome that is important to society is introduced through the elementary school curriculum. The lists of curriculum requirements in almost every state at least to the importance of reading, math, social studies, science, music, art and physical education. The introduction of computers into nearly every elementary school program clearly reflects the values of our electronic information age. Not until world languages become a secure part of the elementary school curriculum will language learning begin to meet the needs and challenges of the twenty first century.”

A document of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (2000) stated that the Three Language Formula must be implemented more vigorously. But the document does not state the curriculum objectives for each language separately. The common curriculum objectives have been followed ever since the Three Language Formula was introduced. For instance, the curriculum objectives of Telugu or Tamil as the first language or mother tongue, most often, they are the cut and paste of the curriculum objectives of some other second or third language. Each language teaching is unique and the same is in the case of imparting English. Therefore, there must be specific teaching objectives relevant to each specific language. As of now, it is not the case in reality. Besides, the quantum of syllabus taught, and the year of starting teaching English differ from state to state. There is no uniformity in the curriculum. This is one of the major problems in teaching EFL/ESL.

Heterogeneous Class

A heterogeneous class has different kinds of learners constituting approximately the same age group but with different abilities, skills and emotional needs. But in a homogeneous class the learners are almost similar in their abilities. According to Penny & Ur heterogeneous classes present problems for both the teacher and the students. Classroom

heterogeneity is one of the main problems in teaching English in the Indian schools. The students in the Indian classrooms in any city or town or even in village usually constitute a mixed ability class. In addition, linguistic heterogeneity is a common phenomenon in such classes. It is well known that students come from different mother tongue, dialect, cultural, social, economic and family backgrounds in India. Another social evil that still exists in Indian classrooms is 'caste'. The performance of students is affected by this socio-economic status of the caste. Apart from the above stated aspects, the history of education in the family certainly contributes to the performance of the students. This heterogeneity not only affects the other subjects like Social Studies, Science but also English Language. This heterogeneous aspect is a great barrier in the acquisition of language skills.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Approaches to the teaching of speaking in ELT have been more strongly influenced by fads and fashion. Speaking in the traditional methodologies usually meant repeating after the teacher, memorizing dialogue or responding to drills. With the advent of Communicative Language Teaching, the view of the language teaching methodologies, have changed. Speaking is a skill and it needs attention in both L1 and L2. As Cummins said learners ability in L1 can be transferred in L2, so teachers have to rethink about the role of L1 for the enhancement of the speaking skills of learners.

Objectives of the Research

- To bring learner's L1 in the English classrooms.
- To create a tension free environment, where learners will get back their individual identity in a multilingual classroom.
- To use learner's L1 as a scaffolding to develop their speaking skills.
- We know, Language is the most powerful medium of oral and written communication. So, it must be learned and taught well. A language teacher has a great responsibility of teaching his students in such a way that they can make the best use of language. Therefore, a language teacher must equip himself with teaching of English as a foreign or a second language. This paper is humble effort to help the teachers of English to teach English language well to their students.
- The purpose of this study is to evaluate the traditional methods of teaching as well as multimedia teaching and to suggest other useful teaching methods that can be attempted in imparting knowledge to the students. Basically teaching must include two major components sending and receiving information. Ultimately teacher tries his best to impart knowledge as the way he understood it. So, any communication method that serves this purpose without destroying the objective could be considered as innovative methods of teaching. The use of innovative methods in educational institutions has the potential not only to improve education but also to empower people, strengthen governance and galvanize the effort to achieve the human development goal for the country.
- In learning language, students develop communication skills and knowledge and come to understand social, historical, familiar relationships and other aspects of the specific language and culture of the speakers of the language they are studying. Learners are also provided with the tools, through comparison and reflection, to understand language, culture and humanity in a broad sense. In this way, language learning contributes to the development of inter-culturally aware citizens, of increasing importance at a time of rapid and deep globalisation.

LITERATURE SURVEY

Everybody has an idea about a language but only a few knows the language. A child learns its mother tongue by listening, speaking, reading and writing, whereas English is learnt in the reverse order. This is the reason why most of the learners do not master the language. It is the duty of the teachers to enable the learners to master the language. Due to tremendous progress in information and communication technology, the scenario of contemporary teaching techniques is entirely changed. The teacher of 21st century should shed traditional concepts and techniques of classroom teaching and should adopt the recent and innovation techniques. English has acquired the position of the world's leading language (Crystal: 2003:1).

No Country and No Culture can Claim Sole Ownership of the English Language

The Sociolinguistics of English is emergent due to demand in the world of communication. Though India is multilingual state still English is used by all community accepted wisdom of sociolinguistics perspectives. Focusing WE theory and pedagogy aspect, The Present study attempts to discuss the Sociolinguistics of English in India in the field of applied linguistics. The rising status and the rapid spread of English over the past four hundred years has led to the emergence of transplanted varieties of English in variegated socio-cultural and linguistic contexts, Indian English is one such variety. English spoken in India is deeply linked with the society, culture and the people. The function of English in India is different from that it performs in the native context. The defining factors such as the cultural plurality and presence of different languages have given India a distinct place in the multilingual context. The growth of English in India can be directly correlated with the growth of imperial rule in India. English language has been and continues to be a dividing force in the society.

In this paper, the position and significance of sociolinguistics in foreign language is examined along three dimensions: attitudes towards learning a foreign language, inclusion of culture in foreign language and the contribution of language planning. This study highlights the English uses, determines one's place and identity in the world. Many different regional varieties of English or 'Englishes' exist around the globe and are slowly but steadily gaining recognition. Finally, English happens to be the most widely used language around the world. The status of English as an international language is also examined.

Proficiency in English for National Development

English is the dominant language of science and technology and therefore proficiency in English for our scientists and engineers is important from Indian national development perspective. Most of the scientific papers or journals in the world are written in English (Dr Weijen DV; November 2012). Proficiency in English is all the more important for the academics and research bodies. English as an international language of science (EILS) has led some users to enjoy preferred treatment and status. Hence it is imperative that our students have the requisite proficiency in English if we want our country to occupy leadership position in the field of science and technology. This country has lost the advantage it had to become the most preferred destination for Voice Processing BPOs and for providing teachers of English to countries like China, Turkey, South Korea and others despite the fact that India ranks second, next only to USA, with regard to the number of English speaking population of the world. If our engineers and scientists continue to be complacent about their proficiency in English Language, the country shall once again be relegated. It is unfortunate that India has been ranked as 'moderate' with regard to English language skills of its citizens in the Global Survey of English-Language Skills Index by

'Education First' magazine (www.economist.com) despite its English learning legacy of over 250 years.

Proficiency in English for Individual Development

Decades ago it was generally believed that engineers were to do technical things behind stage and therefore did not need any higher level of proficiency in English. The engineering curriculum therefore didn't give any emphasis to developing communication skills in English. With India fast becoming a global economy and English being the language of global business, the Indian companies are increasingly focusing on English language skills of employment seeking candidates. Moreover, English is the medium of interpersonal communication in the corporate and therefore having good command on English language has become even more crucial. Engineers usually work in groups and this very nature of their work demands mutual cooperation and effective interpersonal communication within and outside the organization in order to understand and coordinate with co-workers and accomplish their projects. To be able to do so engineers need to possess high level of listening comprehension, speaking and reading fluency and good writing skills in English.

Good communication skills in English and sound domain knowledge is crucial to make the most out of the globalised job market. One cannot hope to survive in a globally competitive setting without having a grip on the language. It would be squarely wrong to depend solely on technical knowledge and skills, which could be less than adequate due lack of language comprehension and production skills in English, to progress on one's professional career. The ability to communicate well in English opens the path to faster progress in one's chosen field. With English language skills, new vistas of employment can open up. In fact, most work-from-home jobs require decent levels of spoken and written English and this can create opportunities for young women folks who quit working due to family commitments. Some hot self-employment options for those good in English include content writing, blogging, etc

In most classrooms in the Indian technical education at university level, the English language is used as the medium of instruction for science. Therefore, English language proficiency plays an important role on the acquisition of content knowledge in the respective domain of study by students. There are two levels of language proficiency: Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)

English Proficiency Survey of Indian Engineer-Aspirants

We have to take cognizance of the emerging perspectives on the subject of English language proficiency requirement and evaluate the present status of the aspirant engineers. We first undertook a literature survey on the subject of linguistic proficiency and communicative competence and looked for secondary data about the English proficiency status of engineer-aspirant Indian youth. Thereafter we undertook a field survey to obtain first-hand experience of the ground reality.

Business standard quoted a report of a recruiting and HR training firm, Aspiring Minds, which says that 43 percent of engineers cannot write correct English and lack accuracy in English grammar. It is further understood from the report that 25-35 per cent of engineers are unable to comprehend effectively written and spoken discourses in English, which include day-to-day conversations, academic lectures and texts. The firm, on the basis of a test conducted covering a very large group of candidates, has asserted that a mere 3.25 per cent of engineering graduates are software-industry-ready, and ready to be hired without needing further training. Almost 73 per cent of those who took the test conducted by the firm were found to lack capability to communicate in English, while 95 per cent were found to be short on technical skills. The report goes on to observe, "This is, and in the future shall become, a major impediment to the growth of

entrepreneurship and IT companies in India.” It adds that this could even affect the growth of the economy of our country.

Several other surveys made by different organizations have similar alarming findings to report. For example, IRIX (Industry Readiness Index) Survey conducted in 2012 by Purple Leap, an organization that trains students to be job-ready, revealed that one third of the graduates from the Tier 2, 3 and 4 engineering colleges are not employable even after interventional training. It reports that students across the country fall short of desirable levels in generic abilities, including communication skills and problem-solving capabilities in particular. Team Lease, another private staffing company which claims to be a heavy recruiter, published a report- India Labour Report for the year 2012, in which it has stated that un-employability is a bigger issue than unemployment. Mohit Gupta, Senior Vice President of Team Lease says, “The higher education situation in the country is pathetic. We once interviewed a candidate from one of the smaller towns in North India. He was an MA in English but could speak only Hindi. When asked why, he replied, ‘I am an MA in English but did it in Hindi!’”. Abraham Ranjit, Rao Sanku Sarath Chandra and Punnoose Subhash also lament over the absence of well-trained and truly qualified engineers and have stated their concern about the quality of the large number of graduates passing out from hordes of Indian engineering institutes dotting the length and breadth of the country. The paper has brought out that a large majority of the engineering students lack analytical thinking skills, debating and public speaking skills which in turn affect their problem solving abilities. One of the immediate solutions the authors have suggested is to improve English language proficiency.

Scientific literacy and literacy in the technical domain for all engineering students is a major educational goal for the students pursuing engineering courses in India. An understanding of scientific and technical knowledge in one’s domain area makes it possible to discuss scientific issues that affect society in later life and make valuable contributions through qualitative research and development, to use scientific knowledge and processes in making personal decisions, and to share in the excitement of scientific discovery and comprehension besides faring well in employment interviews in the campus recruitment. Since English is the medium of all technical and scientific studies in India, any lack in the linguistic proficiency can seriously jeopardize knowledge acquisition and literacy in the technical domain of the aspiring engineer.

METHODOLOGY & DISCUSSIONS

Campus Survey in Odisha

Basing on the foregoing literature survey we thought of looking into English language teaching-learning process in the Indian engineering colleges. We conducted a field survey by randomly selecting students in 1st and 8th semester from different engineering colleges in Bhubaneswar, the capital state of Odisha which receives a large number of students from outside the state. The students included in the survey belonged to two broad categories; the one having a regional language as the medium of study from the primary level to matriculation and the other having English as the medium of study for a similar education. A total of 1479 students coming from different states such as Odisha, Bengal, Jharkhand, UP and others (58 % from Vernacular Medium background and the remaining 42 % from English Medium background) were tested and evaluated. The survey included English language proficiency test in IELTS (Academic) pattern using sample IELTS test papers available as open resource in the internet. The respondents were also tested for their Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)

In most classrooms in the Indian technical education at university level, the English language is used as the medium of instruction for science. Therefore, one of the objectives of this research study was to examine the effects of English language proficiency on the acquisition of science and technology content knowledge by students pursuing

engineering studies. The theoretical foundation to investigate this factor was provided by Cummins' (1981, 1986, 1991) work on cognitive academic language proficiency, which relates both cognitive and linguistic processes to the academic success of students, more specifically non-native English language learners. According to Cummins there are two levels of language proficiency: Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). For the purpose of our study we also tested the respondents for their cognitive academic language proficiency and Oral Reading Fluency.

Oral Reading Fluency is a good measure of student's linguistic competence in a particular language. It is language user's ability to process written text fluently with appropriate rate, accuracy, and expression—making reading sound like language (Stahl & Kuhn, 2002; Kuhn, M. (2004/2005. There is a fundamental link between reading fluency and comprehension. ORF tested and evaluated in terms of WCPM (Words Correct Per Minute) has been shown, in both theoretical and empirical research, to serve as an accurate and powerful indicator of overall reading competence, especially in its strong correlation with comprehension (Pikulski & Chard, 2005). The validity and reliability of these two measures have been well established in a body of research extending over the past 25 years (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp, & Jenkins, 2001; Shinn, 1998) .

Oral Reading Fluency and Comprehension model was adopted because of time limitation which was quite indicative about the cognitive academic language proficiency of the students. The oral reading fluency test in the target language which is an indicator of one's ability to absorb and process information points to the fact that if one reads a message faster he gets more time to understand the text or to take in more messages and understand them all together. So, students cannot learn from books until they can read them fluently, and comprehend the same quickly. Lack of appropriate level of reading fluency could mean that students cannot read volumes of material, as current modern jobs demand. They may be unable to read computer screens and make sense of the material fast enough. For the purpose of Oral Reading Fluency Test students were asked to prepare an abstract of the paper and make an oral presentation of the same.

The Test Results are Appended. (Appendix-I)

It was observed that most students from the English medium fared better than Vernacular medium counterparts in all areas of language skills- listening comprehension, speaking fluency, reading comprehension and writing ability. From a sample of 1479 students' surveyed only 7 percent students qualified as 'Competent Users' while 28 % students could qualify as 'Modest Users' and the rest qualified as 'Extremely limited Users' and 'Limited Users'. Most of these students could read academic texts written in English at less than 110 words per minute with comprehension marking of 20-30%, compared to the standard requirement of 200 words per minute (Anderson, N. J. 2008; Abadzi Helen) and 75% comprehension marking. It was further disappointing to note that about 3.04% of these students could read and comprehend academic English texts at the independent level, while 31.98% required assistance and the rest 64.98% scored at the frustration level. The study also indicates that the level of proficiency of the students at entry to engineering courses is far below the required proficiency for academic success and basic interpersonal communication. The situations warrant a review of the syllabi and evaluation system in schools and the intervention programmes introduced in the engineering colleges.

METHODS & ANALYSIS

English Syllabi Analysis and Observations

We analyzed the English language syllabi of ICSE, CBSE and BSE of Odisha. The ICSE English syllabus aims at developing and integrating the use of the four language skills for the purpose of effective communication and cognitive academic language proficiency. Students are expected to develop a functional understanding of the grammar, structure, and a large vocabulary; develop the capacity to read efficiently and access information effectively; develop an appreciation of good literature and experience through literature the thoughts and feelings of people of the world. To summarize, students are expected to develop their ability to exchange thoughts, ideas, and opinions through both oral and written discourses in the target language i.e. English. The English course designed by the Central Board of Secondary Education and the Boards of secondary education in the states (which follow the CBSE pattern by and large) also aim at developing students' communicative competence in English as is evidenced from the learning outcomes enumerated in their syllabi.

Despite very good syllabus developed by the various Boards of Secondary education, English language proficiency in the Indian schools and colleges have remained inhibited and the factors for such dismal situation can be attributed to failure of English language teaching-learning-evaluation process which ultimately affects their appreciation of higher levels of academic learning. We have observed that in vernacular medium schools today English is almost treated as an alien language and proficiency in the language exists at a literal rather than at inferential level and where meaningful interaction in English is rare. Many teachers in vernacular medium schools themselves have low levels of proficiency in English and they too operate at the literal level. Although they are required to teach in English, they often resort to code switching while teaching and hand out summaries and notes in English which the students rote-learn to pass examinations.

Students often resort to decoding English into their mother tongue or the first language whichever they find convenient and then reinterpret their thoughts into English, a situation potential for occurrence of considerable misinterpretation. This results in lack of ability to clearly express their thoughts in both written and spoken forms; all of which translates into high communication failure potential. Once students from such a background enter higher education, they are certainly disadvantaged and often are unable to adapt to the discourse-based environment in the universities and institutes of higher education. The students' English language proficiency level survey made in the engineering colleges of Odisha by us indicated that students coming from vernacular medium lacked comprehension skills required for successful completion of their courses. The situation for students coming from English medium schools is only slightly better than the vernacular medium counterparts.

Observations

It is observed that the evaluation system of the various examining bodies like ICSE, CBSE and State Boards lack tooth in evaluating true proficiency levels of their students. These examinations can at best be described as ritualistic. At the end of the school curriculum students sit for examinations and are awarded scores. But these scores in reality do not appear to be reflecting the true proficiency of the students. In English medium schools where students enter without adequate exposure and fluency in the target language, students genuinely feel overwhelmed as everything is transacted in English. In order to overcome the problems of inadequate English comprehension, students in order to survive, resort to rote learning strategies. Students from English medium schools also lack the ability to comprehend English spoken by native speakers.

On the other hand the various English Language Proficiency Assessment Examinations such as IELTS, TOEFL, BEC, etc. evaluate the candidates through their tests and interpret students' scores in terms of their proficiency levels. Here, it would be pertinent to have a view of the various proficiency levels enumerated by the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) of Cambridge University which is widely accepted as capable of truly reflecting the real communicative proficiency of English language learners in non-native settings. The IELTS, places candidates taking the test in 9 proficiency levels referred to as Band Scores- Non User, Intermittent User, Extremely Limited User, Limited User, Modest User, Competent User, Good User, Very Good User and Expert User (Refer table 1 below)

Table 1: The Interpretations of IELTS Band Scores

Band Score	Score Interpretation
1	Non User. Essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.
2	Intermittent User. No real communication is possible except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulae in familiar situations and to meet immediate needs. Has great difficulty understanding spoken and written English.
3	Extremely Limited User. Conveys and understands only general meaning in very familiar situations. Frequent breakdowns in communication occur.
4	Limited User. Basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Have frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.
5	Modest User. Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.
6	Competent User. Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.
7	Good User. Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.
8	Very Good User. Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.
9	Expert User. Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.

RESULTS

An Exploratory, Explanatory and Expository Analysis of the Levels of Study of Languages and their Evaluation Patterns in the Multi-Lingual School Set-ups in Indian Schools

A number of languages are spoken in India and are used for wider communication within respective territories of the individual states because of conservative government language policies adopted by these states, political ethos, cultural pressures, etc. and as a result we have a large number of bi-lingual or multi-lingual social set-ups in India. There are many children who have been and continue to be educated through their first language at least up to matriculation (10th Class). In some states education is imparted in the respective regional language (first language) even in higher secondary level. In the schools where education is initiated and continued in the first language up to class 10, the students are introduced to English at either early primary level or late primary level as a compulsory paper. In some states, students are introduced to Hindi, again as a compulsory paper at this level of primary education. Moreover, students are allowed to select Sanskrit as an optional paper somewhere at later primary level of education. The situation in English medium school is not very different from the regional language medium schools in the fact that students in such schools also study their mother tongue, Hindi, English which is introduced right from Nursery and Kindergarten and continues to remain the medium of

education throughout the school education and an optional language like Sanskrit. It implies that all school in India, whether vernacular or English medium are necessarily multi-lingual set ups. The use of multiple languages in schools as subjects of study and selection of one particular language as a lingua franca is attributable to numerous factors, such as the linguistic heterogeneity of the country/region, specific social, political and religious attitudes or to promote national identity. English is added to the repertoire of languages of the students' as a paper in the vernacular schools at late primary stage as the lingua franca of higher academics. English is adopted in English medium schools at early primary stage mostly for ensuring enhanced proficiency in English as the academic lingua franca and of course with an oblique focus on social status elevation. It is not clear as to which languages are taught as the first, second, third respectively and which language is taught as the academic lingua franca. At this point it is considered relevant to study rigor of study and evaluation of language proficiency developed in these languages in the multi-cultural setting of the Indian schools. In the present paper the authors have tried to present an exploratory, explanatory and expository analysis of the levels of study and evaluation patterns adopted in the multi-lingual school set-ups.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Hence, the problem lies basically in teaching English as a second language and relates to the teaching-learning and evaluation process. We need to ask a few questions to ourselves in order to arrive at any solution. The first question that comes to our mind is why we are learning English. The second question is to what extent we should develop our learning experience of the language so that we can achieve our goal-academic and communicative. Both the questions have been answered already in the foregoing paragraphs. Students learn at different rates. How quickly or how slowly a student learns depends on his or her age, health, motivation, attitude, personality, characteristics, learning approach, and previous education and school experiences.

Most students in India entering English medium school have limited exposure to English language and have not generally developed adequate conversational and interpersonal skills in English by that time. Therefore they would need more time to develop the required skills for successful learning in the regular classroom situation. Learners who have had substantial exposure to English language before entering a school require less support and time before they are fully integrated into the regular classroom. The primary school English syllabi rather overwhelm the students and force them to rote learning and hence the desired outcome is not accomplished.

We therefore hold the view that:

- English should be introduced right at nursery level so that children develop required fluency to appreciate texts in English introduced in standard I and above.
- Selection of appropriate study materials to encourage students to really learn and develop communicative competence rather than resort to rote learning.
- The primary school English syllabi should give more emphasis to oral reading and speaking fluency development.

In the Indian context students are learning English which is a minority language. It takes about 10000 hours of immersion in the target language to attain fluency (Archibald et al, 2007). In our English medium schools today students interact in English in classrooms only. Considering that there are 4 periods on each working day where interaction takes place in English (other language classes are excluded) and there are only 180 working days in an academic year, immersion in English language works out to 7200 hours for a student who enters the school in the standard I. On the other

hand direct immersion in English language in vernacular medium schools is far too less (1080 hours) as most schools introduce English much later. Indirect immersion in English language is practically non-existent in the vernacular medium schools and is vanishing from the English medium schools.

Such levels of immersion could be adequate for rote learning and passing the board examinations but certainly inadequate to enable the students to attain the desired level of linguistic competence in English to meet the challenges of higher education environment and communication needs. In learning a language, the aim is to be able to utilize the language in day-to-day tasks and also to meet the academic demands. The linguistic competence is crucial for the students and teachers as well. The teaching-learning process should ensure that learning does take place and the learners do achieve their long-term goals which include learners' ability to communicate in the target language outside of classrooms and realize various professional/career opportunities. Although, the technical universities do have programmes which run for one or two semesters, situation does not register any appreciable change in the communication skills of the students in reality due mainly to immersion insufficiency.

The students' learning problem is compounded by the lack of appropriately trained English language teachers at all levels. Focus on improving English language proficiency of the teachers could help in improving the situation as students may have very little to learn from their not-proficient-enough teachers. The English proficiency of teachers in rural areas and even in the English medium schools is far from satisfactory. A mere university degree in English or a degree in education does not really guarantee proficiency of the teachers in English language teaching. We are of the opinion that the teachers must have at least IELTS level-9 proficiency level in order to be effective as teachers of English because the need of the hour is to teach English as a foreign language. May be, TESOL programmes may be made mandatory for taking up teacher positions in schools and colleges. Teachers of other subjects should also be asked to take IELTS or other such internationally recognized language proficiency. This has to be so because, students' learning of English is not necessarily be restricted to English classes but also happen through the other subjects which are part of the qualifying examinations.

CONCLUSIONS

A curriculum that maximizes the learning of all students is one that recognizes and celebrates diversity and engages with all students in intellectually challenging learning experiences. It provides students with clear guidelines on what they are learning and how they will be assessed. It involves a range of teaching strategies to meet different teaching needs and explicit teaching to scaffold students' learning so that they develop and consolidate the required knowledge and skills to meet the anticipated future demands of work and citizenship. To ensure that the intended learning goals for all learners are met the essential components of planning, pedagogy; assessment and reporting are needed to be addressed.

We recommend that all students should be provided with the opportunity and learning ambience so that they can engage with and participate in the learning of English language and mastering competence at the appropriate grade level specified and mandated in curriculum documents. Since Curriculum is much more than a syllabus which outlines what is to be taught, we are of the opinion that schools and teachers should enable all students to access and achieve the learning described in the syllabi documents. This may involve adjustments to curriculum development tasks, development of teaching materials, classroom organization and management, facilitating appropriate learning experiences, modifying teaching styles and assessment procedures. It requires the curriculum to be designed for flexibility and to be able to support teachers to be responsive to students' educational needs in proactive ways.

Although theoretical knowledge of engineering along with technical competence is what is sought and taught in the Faculty of Engineering, it appears that this should be coupled with communication. The importance of communication skills is also highlighted in research conducted in industry and engineering job markets, more specifically, with regard to the Employability Skills Profile (ESP). Based on the findings of the study conducted by us it is recommended that a benchmark proficiency level should be made mandatory for students wishing to join graduate engineering courses so that they can further work towards developing effective Employability Skills Profile for themselves.

It may be considered to select one of the band scores of IELTS or any other equivalent international English language proficiency testing system to set it as the benchmark for entry into graduate engineering courses. Later in the college the curriculum may be designed to provide and facilitate involvement of learners in more interactive sessions in classrooms and more academically enriching engagements with the language so that they are able to strengthen their communicative competence and cognitive academic language proficiency. Additionally, teaching technical and business communication should be at a much higher level than at what the English syllabi in the engineering colleges offer at present.

Thus, new course and curriculum designing and activities would help to achieve the goals and objectives of language study in the engineering colleges. A good command over English language is all time high demand skills in the present scenario of 21st century developing India. It is also considered a global language and an inevitable, pre-requisite condition for development in this cut throat competitions of the economies and professional world of developing countries. It is the only means to communicate and transact worldwide. The role of technology in making English language teaching and learning possible is the most crucial one. Using Digital resources in schools, colleges, at home and in societies in general, has resulted in positive impact and ease in teaching learning process being very effective and powerful tool in causing paradigm shift in pedagogy. Digital resources not just make teaching and learning interesting and easy but also help in developing critical thinking, inquiry based learning and team-work in the case of both teachers and students while engaging in teaching and learning tasks. The dream of Global India can only be fulfilled by making immense and effective use of technology so as to empower English language of its citizen's especially young learners

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(APPENDIX-1)

English Language Proficiency Level Assessment of Student Pursuing Engineering Course in Different Institutes in Bhubaneswar

TEST RESULT

Table 2

Total Number of Students Tested on IELTS Sample Paper = 1479			
English Medium (833)			Vernacular Medium (626)
ICSE	CBSE		BSEs
246	375		858
English Language Proficiency Assessment			
Tools Used:			
Test through IELTS Sample Paper (www.examenglish.com)			
IELTS BAND SCORE	ICSE	CBSE	BSEs
Expert User (9)	Nil	Nil	Nil
Very Good User (8)	Nil	Nil	Nil

Table 2: Contd.,			
Good User (7)	Nil	Nil	Nil
Competent User (6)	62	42	Nil
Modest User (5)	167	196	51
Limited User (4)	17	137	659
Extremely Limited User-(3)	Nil	Nil	148
Intermittent User (2)	Nil	Nil	Nil
Non User(1)	Nil	Nil	Nil

Table 3

ORAL READING FLUENCY & COMPREHENSION TEST			
LEVEL	ICSE	CBSE	BSE
Expert User (reads at 200 or more wpm with 70% comprehension)	Nil	Nil	Nil
Very Good User (Reads at 175-200 wpm with 60% comprehension)	Nil	Nil	Nil
Good User (Reads at 150-175 wpm with 50% comprehension)	Nil	Nil	Nil
Competent User (125-150 wpm, with 40% comprehension)	Nil	Nil	Nil
Modest User (100-125 wpm with 30% comprehension)	28	17	Nil
Limited User (75-100 wpm with 20% comprehension)	173	298	2
Extremely Limited User (50-75 wpm with 10% comprehension)	167	317	477